



# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## WELCOME HOME CEREMONY SET FOR 1-147TH FIELD ARTILLERY

A welcome home ceremony is scheduled for 110 soldiers with the South Dakota Army National Guard's Alpha Battery, 1-147th Field Artillery Battalion and 147th Forward Support Company at the Civic Center in Aberdeen on Saturday, July 25 at 2:30 p.m.

The soldiers are returning home after serving on a 10-month deployment to Europe in support of Operation Atlantic Resolve, which enhances the U.S. deterrence posture, increases the readiness and responsiveness of U.S. forces in Europe, and supports the collective defense and security of U.S. allies and partners.

The ceremony will be limited to unit soldiers and their family members, as well as SDNG leadership, to allow for health and social distancing guidelines. The ceremony will be live streamed for public viewing via Facebook at: <http://www.facebook.com/SouthDakotaNationalGuard>.

Planned speakers for the ceremony include Gov. Kristi Noem; Maj. Gen. Jeff Marlette, SDNG adjutant general; and Capt. Craig Evenson, Alpha Battery commander.

The Aberdeen-based Alpha Battery is equipped with the Multiple Launch Rocket System, or MLRS, and provides artillery support to a brigade, division, corps or coalition task force. The Watertown-based Forward Support Company is a multi-functional logistics unit which provides supply and maintenance support.

The unit arrived in the United States July 8 and have been completing demobilization requirements at Fort Hood, Texas, before returning to South Dakota.

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# SD VETERANS COUNCIL TOURS

## SD STATE CEMETERY

Members of the South Dakota Veterans Council met this week in Sioux Falls to hear reports on the South Dakota State Cemetery, Sioux Falls VAHCS, congressional activity, legislative session, and council dues. SDDVA Secretary Whitlock updated the SDVC membership on SDDVA's activities.

The Council reviewed participation at the State Fair, award nominations, and discussed establishing a SDVC web-site.

The Council ended their meeting with a tour of the State Veterans Cemetery.





# HOT CLASSICS NIGHT TO SUPPORT STATE VETERANS CEMETERY FOUNDATION

Nyberg's Ace 3rd Annual Hot Classics Night – Classic Car Show will be held Saturday, July 25, from 2 pm – 10 pm (CT) at their downtown location (200 E. 12th Street).

Hot Classics Nights is one of the biggest car shows downtown and includes:

- Cars, food trucks and beverages
- Live music by Mogen's Heros, Last Call, and DNR.



Parking will begin at noon and there is no registration fee

A "classic vehicle" consists of a car or truck at least 20 years old and of sufficient historical interest to be preserved or restored and considered a collectable. (ex. Corvette, Camaro, Mustang, Muscle Cars, etc.)

Other sponsors for the event include: Dakota Digital, Straightlines Custom Restorations, The Ritz II, and Dakota News Now. Proceeds will go to: South Dakota State Veterans Cemetery and El Riad Shrine Classic Autos.

In 2019, there were over 500 cars shown and over 10,000 people in attendance.

Due to COVID-19, the following safety precautions are in effect during the event: if you feel sick, please stay home, respect everyone and keep the recommended six-feet of distance from others, masks are recommended but not required, and sanitizer stations will be located throughout the event.

# VA HEALTHCARE FIRST TO HAVE CENTERS FOR MEDICARE AND MEDICAID SERVICES CODES FOR CHAPLAIN CARE

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it has been approved to establish three new Healthcare Common Procedure Coding System (HCPCS) codes for chaplain spiritual care.

The new [Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services](#) (CMS) health care settings provide 15-minute sessions each for chaplain pastoral and spiritual assessment services, individual counseling, and group therapy.

This is the first time an organization has been granted these independent health care codes created for use by their clinical chaplains in a stand-alone setting.

“VA’s chaplain spiritual care is highly integrated into the total care and treatment program for veterans,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “The clinically trained chaplains provide in-depth assessment, evaluation, and treatment of patients who often have many different physical, social, mental, and spiritual needs.”

The new HCPCS codes further enable a comprehensive bio-psycho-social-spiritual approach. They facilitate outlining a patient’s intrinsic and extrinsic spirituality, spiritual preference, practices and health, coping mechanisms and well-being. This ultimately helps with goal development of spiritual care unique to a patient’s needs and family/caregiver support.

VA chaplains also provide consultation, counseling and support to family members, caregivers and VA staff.

The three new CMS HCPCS codes will go into effect October 1. More information about the codes can be found at [CMS Summary for Bi-Annual 2020 Meeting](#) pages 45-46.



# 2-196TH RTI CHANGES COMMAND

Lt. Col. Greg Darlow, of Rapid City, is the new commander of the South Dakota Army National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 196th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) in Sioux Falls.

Lt. Col. Darlow assumed command of the unit July 20 from Lt. Col. Martin Yost, who commanded the battalion since October 1, 2018.

"I am humbled and honored that the leadership of the SDARNG bestowed the privilege of commanding the outstanding soldiers of the 2-196th RTI," Darlow said after accepting command. "Lt. Col. Martin Yost had an incredible command, and I want to thank

him for leading this battalion and exceeding the standards at every level. I look forward to serving with the men and women of the 2-196th RTI, as well as providing the very best training and education to all soldiers to meet the ever-increasing demands that face our state and nation."

The 2-196th RTI provides a model environment for training future leaders for the Army National Guard and provides general instruction on a variety of military courses to improve soldier and unit readiness.

Darlow currently serves as the full-time deputy G4 at Joint Force Headquarters for the SDARNG, where he oversees supply, logistics, and surface maintenance sections for the SDARNG. He has been a member of the SDARNG since Oct. 20, 1988.

Yost is now assigned to the 196th Movement Enhancement Brigade, where he will serve as part of the unit's upcoming mobilization. Yost serves as the full-time director of Construction Facilities Management Officer at Joint Force Headquarters for the SDARNG, which encompasses all construction and repairs for facilities managed by the SDARNG.

"Since assuming command of the 2-196th in October of 2018, I have observed the soldiers of the battalion and soldiers from across the United States that we have trained, and I have been extremely impressed by their abilities and performance of our instructors and soldiers," said Yost. "This command was an enormously uplifting and rejuvenating experience for me, and I appreciate the opportunity to serve with the finest soldiers as the commander of the 2-196th RTI."



# VABHHCS SUCCESSFULLY EXPANDS VIDEO VISITS IN 2020

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently announced that video telehealth appointments to veterans' homes increased over 1000%, as veterans increasingly chose virtual care through VA Video Connect during the Covid-19 pandemic. VA Black Hills Health Care System (VABHHCS) conducted over 674 telehealth appointments between March and June 2020.

VA Video Connect allows veterans and their caregivers to meet virtually with their VA health care teams on any computer, tablet, or mobile device with an internet connection. As we gradually move to more face to face appointments, VA Video Connect will continue to support veterans' abilities to continue care and remain safely at home.

The increased usage of telehealth at VABHHCS represents an approximate 200% increase from March 2020. There are roughly thirty-eight specialty services offered through telehealth in areas like oncology, pharmacy and urology. The care may be delivered to the veteran individually, in a group or even a family setting. Delivering care through telehealth is not new to VA but because of increased COVID-19 precautions it has expanded to provide even greater access to services like chaplain care, suicide, and homeless prevention.

The VA is also taking strides to bridge the digital divide for veterans who lack the technology or broadband internet connectivity required to participate in VA telehealth services. At the national level, the VA is working with strategic partners, through the VA Secretary's Center of Strategic Partnerships, to increase access to the technology that Veterans need to connect with their VA health care team virtually.

"Telehealth has been an excellent tool and reliable resource to maintain ongoing care, especially during these challenging times," said Jill Tobin, telehealth nurse manager. "As the service becomes more popular with veterans, the VA remains committed to providing a seamless user experience to ensure access to care and the same high-quality veterans have come to expect."

Read more about [VA Video Connect](#). For information about VA's telehealth services visit [connect-edcare.va.gov](https://connect-edcare.va.gov).



VETERANS

VA Video Connect

★★★★★ Average: 3.6 (525 votes)



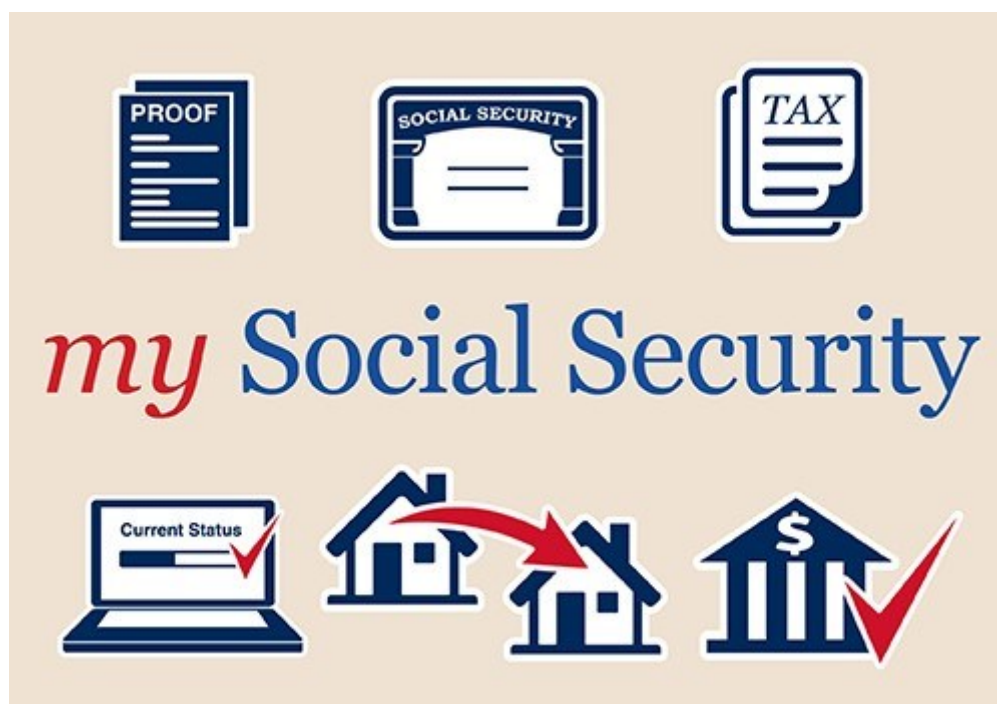
# NEW BENEFIT VERIFICATION LETTER FROM SOCIAL SECURITY

This past year, the Social Security Administration held discussions with their partners on ways to improve their Benefit Verification letters. They listened to your recommendations and are excited to release a new letter. Soon, when a person requests a Benefit Verification letter, they will provide a standardized letter, whether they accessed their [my Social Security](#) account, called their 800-number, or visited a local office. They will phase-in the new standard letter across their service channels over the summer.

As a reminder, your customers can use the benefit verification letter as proof of:

- Income, if applying for a loan or mortgage;
- Income for assisted housing or other state or local benefits;
- Current Medicare health insurance coverage;
- Retirement status;
- Disability; and
- Age.

People who do not currently receive Social Security benefits can use their Benefit Verification letter as proof that they do not receive benefits. They can also use it as proof that they do or do not have a pending application for benefits.





# STUDY SHOWS VA SURGICAL CARE BETTER THAN, OR EQUAL TO, NON-VA HOSPITALS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced VA hospitals outperform or match neighboring non-VA hospitals in surgical quality and overall patient safety satisfaction.

The finding comes from a study conducted by VA and university researchers that was published June 26, in the Journal of Surgical Research.

“The prospect of having surgery can be stressful,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “For veterans, who often have choices in where they receive care, it is in their best interest to make fully informed health care decisions. This study provides valuable information when faced with such an important choice.”

Researchers at the White River Junction VA Medical Center in Vermont and the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center in New Hampshire completed the study. They identified VA medical centers with at least



**Agency for Healthcare  
Research and Quality**

one non-VA hospital within 25 miles in three U.S. regions: West-Southwest, New England and Deep South.

With a sample of 34 VA facilities and 319 neighboring non-VA hospitals, the researchers used benchmarks created by the [Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality](#). They also used scores from the [Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems](#). The results showed VA facilities performed better or as good as non-VA hospitals in overall patient safety indicators (PSIs), which measure potential hospital complications and adverse events following surgeries and other procedures. VA hospitals performed much better in surgery specific PSIs.

The researchers also found VA and non-VA hospitals were about equal in patient satisfaction with overall hospital experience.

The data was collected from [Hospital Compare](#), a publicly available database that helps consumers decide where to seek health care. The [Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services](#) runs the database.



# CENSUS TAKERS IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Starting in July, census takers will visit homes that haven't yet responded to the 2020 Census.

## **What should you expect?**

Census takers will wear masks and follow local public health guidelines when they visit your home. All census takers complete a virtual COVID-19 training on social distancing and other health and safety protocols before beginning their work in neighborhoods.

Census takers are hired from your area, and their goal is to help you and everyone in your home be counted in the 2020 Census. If the census taker who visits your home does not speak your language, you may request a return visit from a census taker who does speak your language.

If no one is home when the census taker visits, the census taker will leave a notice of their visit with information about how to [respond online](#), [by phone](#) or [by mail](#).

If you respond online or by phone today, a census taker is less likely to have to visit your home to collect your response.

## **How can you verify that someone is a Census taker?**

If someone visits your home this year to collect information for the 2020 Census, check to make sure they have a valid ID badge with their photograph, a U.S. Department of Commerce watermark, and an expiration date. Census workers may also carry Census Bureau bags and other equipment with the Census Bureau logo.



# UPCOMING EVENTS

Aug 5-11—HyVee Stores “Operation Helpful Smile” DAV Fundraiser—Sioux Falls  
Aug 6—National A&W Root Beer Float Day  
Aug 24—Barrel House Day of Giving for Midwest Honor Flight—Sioux Falls  
Aug 24-27—SDDVA Annual Benefit School—Ramkota Conference Center—Pierre  
Sep 3—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair  
Sep 3-7—SD State Fair  
Sep 5—DAV/727 Poker Run—Swiftel Center—Brookings  
Sep 7—State Offices Closed  
Sep 11—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)  
Sep 18—POW/MIA Day Ceremony—Veterans Memorial Park—Sioux Falls—6:30 pm (CT)  
Sep 18—Veterans Stand Down—SD Military Heritage Alliance Building—Sioux Falls—9:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)  
Nov 13—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs VAMC—10:00 am (MT)  
Dec 1—Governor’s State of the Budget Address—1:00 pm (CT)  
Jan 12—Governor’s State of the State Address—1:00 pm (CT)  
Jan 13—SDDVA/SD Veterans Council Legislative Reception

Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer  
South Dakota Department of the Military <http://military.sd.gov>  
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs <http://vetaffairs.sd.gov>  
Soldiers and Sailors Building - 425 E Capitol Avenue  
Pierre, SD 57501  
Phone: 605-773-8242  
E-mail address: [audry.ricketts@state.sd.us](mailto:audry.ricketts@state.sd.us)

